The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1. A method for optimizing placement of search result listings displayed in a search Web page, the method comprising:

measuring an actual performance of a listing located in a Web page containing a search term and a search result corresponding to the search term;

assigning an expected performance for the listing based on the location;

comparing the actual performance to the expected performance for the listing;

promoting the listing to a more prominent location when the actual performance is better than the expected performance; and

demoting the listing to a less prominent location when the actual performance is poorer than the expected performance.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein assigning the expected performance includes increasing the expected performance when the listing is prominently located, and decreasing the expected performance when the listing is not prominently located.

3. The method of Claim 2, wherein the listing is prominently located when it is included in the search result.

4. The method of Claim 2, wherein the listing is prominently located when it is located near the search term.

5. The method of Claim 2, wherein the listing is not prominently located when it is located in a sidebar on the Web page.

6. The method of Claim 2, wherein the listing is not prominently located when it is located separately from the search result.

7. The method of Claim 1, further comprising increasing the expected performance of the listing based on a context of the listing, wherein the context of the listing

comprises factors that increase performance, including at least one of a position of the listing above other listings, a larger size of the listing relative to other listings, a distinctive formatting applied to the display of the listing, including a contrasting color, a highlighting, an animation, and a graphic, and a good performance of a neighboring listing.

8. The method of Claim 1, further comprising decreasing the expected performance of the listing based on a context of the listing, wherein the context of the listing comprises factors that decrease performance, including at least one of a position of the listing below other listings, a smaller size of the listing relative to other listings, a lack of distinctive formatting applied to the display of the listing, and a poor performance of a neighboring listing.

9. The method of Claim 1, wherein the performance of a listing is a click-through rate, where the click-through rate is derived from a number of times the listing is displayed in the Web page as compared to a number of times the listing is clicked after being displayed.

10. The method of Claim 1, wherein the listing is an unpaid listing, and the expected performance is a threshold level that is tuned to optimize unpaid listing relevance.

11. The method of Claim 1, wherein the listing is a paid listing that generates advertising revenue each time it is clicked, and the expected performance is a threshold level that is tuned to optimize paid listing revenue.

12. The method of Claim 1, wherein the expected performance of a listing is a threshold performance level that is tuned to a particular market.

13. The method of Claim 1, wherein the performance of a listing is based on an overall performance of a set of listings to which the listing belongs, and promoting and demoting the listing includes promoting and demoting the set of listings based on the overall performance.

14.   The method of Claim 9, wherein the overall performance of the set of listings is based on the expected performance of each listing in the set, wherein the expected performance varies based on a position of each listing within the set.

15.   The method of Claim 1, wherein the actual performance is better than the expected performance when the actual performance substantially exceeds the expected performance, and poorer when the actual performance falls substantially short of the expected performance.

16.   A search results optimization system comprising:

a performance measurement process to measure an actual performance of a listing appearing a search results Web page against an expected performance level, where the expected performance level is based on whether the listing appears in a more prominent or less prominent location;

a listing placement process to promote the listing to the more prominent location when the actual performance measures higher than the expected performance level, and to demote the listing to the less prominent location when the actual performance measures lower than the expected performance level.

17.   The system of Claim 16, wherein to measure an actual performance includes capturing a number of impressions of a listing and a number of clicks on a listing, and a current location of the listing relative to a location of the search results on the Web page.

18.   The system of Claim 16, wherein the more prominent location is a location in which a listing is expected to receive a greater number of clicks than that received in the less prominent location.

19.   The system of Claim 18, wherein the listing is in the more prominent location when it is located near the search term.

20.   The system of Claim 18, wherein the listing is in the less prominent location when it is located in a sidebar on the Web page.

21.   The system of Claim 18, wherein the listing is in the less prominent location when it is located separately from the search result.

22.   The system of Claim 16, wherein the expected performance levels in the performance settings repository are tuned to optimize at least one of advertising revenue and search result relevance.

23.   The system of Claim 16, wherein the performance measurement process takes a context of the listing into consideration when measuring the actual performance of the listing against the expected performance level for the listing.

24.   The system of Claim 16, wherein the context of the listing comprises factors that increase performance, including at least one of a position of the listing above other listings, a larger size of the listing relative to other listings, a distinctive formatting applied to the display of the listing, including a contrasting color, a highlighting, an animation, and a graphic, and a good performance of a neighboring listing, and factors that decrease performance, including at least one of a position of the listing below other listings, a smaller size of the listing relative to other listings, a lack of distinctive formatting applied to the display of the listing, and a poor performance of a neighboring listing.

25.   The system of Claim 16, wherein the actual performance measures higher than the expected performance level when the actual performance is substantially greater than the expected performance, and measures lower when the actual performance is substantially less than the expected performance.

26.   One or more computer-accessible media having instructions for facilitating the optimal placement of search result listings in a search result user interface, the instructions comprising:
        placing a listing for a search result in an initial location based on an expected click-through rate (CTR);
            capturing an actual CTR of the listing;
            normalizing the actual CTR based on the location; and

promoting the listing to a more desirable location when the normalized CTR is better than the expected CTR, and demote the listing to a less desirable location when the normalized CTR is worse than the expected CTR.

27. The computer-accessible media of Claim 26, wherein the instruction to track an actual CTR of the listing includes to capture a location of the listing when it was clicked, and the instruction to normalize the actual CTR is to adjust the CTR down when the location has a positive influence on CTR, and to adjust the CTR up when the location has a negative influence on CTR.

28. The computer-accessible media of Claim 26, the instructions further comprising:

capturing a context of the listing when it was clicked, wherein the instruction to normalize the actual CTR includes to normalize the actual CTR based on the context.

29. The computer-accessible media of Claim 28, wherein the context of the listing comprises factors that influence performance, including at least one of a position of the listing relative to other listings appearing in the search results user interface, a size of the listing relative to other listings, a presence or absence of distinctive formatting applied to the display of the listing relative to the other listings, including a contrasting color, a highlighting, an animation, and a graphic, and a CTR of an adjacent listing.

30. The computer-accessible media of Claim 26, wherein the listing is a pay-per-click listing and the expected CTR is set to optimize revenue earned from the listing.

31. The computer-accessible media of Claim 26, wherein the listing is an unpaid listing and the expected CTR is set to optimize relevance of the placement of the search result listing.

32. A method in a computer system for displaying on a display device a search result Web page for a search term query, the search result Web page including at least two sections in which to display a search result listing, the one section located in a more

prominent area of the display device and the other section located in a less prominent area of the display device, the method comprising:

assigning an expected performance of a search result listing based on a location of the section in the Web page in which it appears;

measuring an actual performance of the search result listing;

comparing the actual performance to the expected performance;

moving the listing to the more prominent section when the actual performance is better than the expected performance; and

moving the listing to the less prominent section when the actual performance is poorer than the expected performance.

33.   The method of Claim 32, wherein assigning the expected performance includes increasing the expected performance when the listing is in the more prominent section and decreasing the expected performance when the listing is in the less prominent section.

34.   The method of Claim 32, wherein the more prominent section includes the most relevant search result listings.

35.   The method of Claim 32, wherein the prominent section is located near a search term entry associated with the search result listings.

36.   The method of Claim 32, wherein the less prominent section is located in a sidebar on the Web page.

37.   The method of Claim 32, wherein the less prominent section includes less relevant search result listings than the more prominent section.

38.   The method of Claim 32, further comprising increasing the expected performance of the listing based on a context of the listing, wherein the context of the listing comprises factors that increase performance, including at least one of a position of the listing above other listings, a larger size of the listing relative to other listings, a distinctive

formatting applied to the display of the listing, including a contrasting color, a highlighting, an animation, and a graphic, and a good performance of a neighboring listing.

39.   The method of Claim 32, further comprising decreasing the expected performance of the listing based on a context of the listing, wherein the context of the listing comprises factors that decrease performance, including at least one of a position of the listing below other listings, a smaller size of the listing relative to other listings, a lack of distinctive formatting applied to the display of the listing, and a poor performance of a neighboring listing.

40.   The method of Claim 32, wherein the performance of a listing is a click-through rate, where the click-through rate is derived from a number of times the listing is displayed in the Web page as compared to a number of times the listing is clicked after being displayed.

41.   The method of Claim 32, wherein the listing is an unpaid listing, and the expected performance is a threshold level that is tuned to optimize unpaid listing relevance.

42.   The method of Claim 32, wherein the listing is paid listing that generates advertising revenue each time it is clicked, and the expected performance is a threshold level that is tuned to optimize paid listing revenue.

43.   The method of Claim 32, wherein the expected performance of a listing is a threshold performance level that is tuned to a particular market.

44.   The method of Claim 32, wherein the performance of a listing is based on an overall performance of the section in which the listing appears, and moving the listing includes moving all of the listings appearing in the section based on the overall performance.

45.   The method of Claim 44, wherein the overall performance of the section is based on the expected performance of each listing in the section, wherein the expected performance is based on where each listing appears within the section.

46. The method of Claim 32, wherein the actual performance is better than the expected performance when the actual performance substantially exceeds the expected performance, and poorer when the actual performance falls substantially short of the expected performance.